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Programme 7. Economic and social information and policy analysis

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7.1 The general orientation of this programme is the promotion of an integrated approach to economic, social and environmental aspects of development, including the elaboration of perspectives that will provide for sustainable, equitable and participatory development. The programme will also develop and promote a coordinated approach to key policy issues. To that end, the programme will assist Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and others interested in determining development priorities at the international, national and local levels, and will contribute to devising policies and measures aimed at fulfilling them. The programme seeks to achieve this primarily by contributing to knowledge and understanding of development processes and of the consequences of the actions of different participants in those processes.

7.2 The mandate for the programme lies in the responsibilities entrusted to the Secretariat by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and certain of its subsidiary bodies for the elaboration of economic and social information, for the analysis of development issues, trends and policies, and for the execution of technical cooperation activities in certain of those areas. More specifically, the mandate derives from General Assembly resolutions 118 (II) of 31 October 1947, 3362 (S-VII) of 16 September 1975, 32/197 of 20 December 1977, 39/228 of 18 December 1984, 45/264 of 13 May 1991 and 46/235 of 13 April 1992; relevant parts of the programmes of action adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women; and Economic and Social Council resolutions 8 (I), 9 (II) and 3 (III). The responsibility for the implementation of this programme is assigned to the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis.

7.3 By the end of the period covered by the plan, the programme would have accomplished the following:

(a) Developed and increased the dissemination of statistical concepts and methods and new statistical data-processing technologies;

(b) Improved the collection, compilation and dissemination of economic, social and population information;

(c) Elaborated estimates and projections and identified and analysed emerging economic and social issues;

(d) Analysed long-term development issues, including the relationships between the social and economic dimensions and between population and development;

(e) Monitored and assessed, from a global perspective, economic and social developments, policies and problems, in particular those relating to international cooperation, and provided alternative policy approaches to some of the issues confronting the international community;

(f) Provided technical cooperation in the foregoing areas of competence;

(g) Enhanced the synergies within the Department and strengthened cooperation with other related programmes.

Subprogramme 7.1 Statistics

7.4 The subprogramme, for which the Statistical Division is responsible, will focus on five main objectives during the period covered by the plan, as follows:

(a) Over the years, the subprogramme has contributed to the significant progress in the international collection, standardization, analysis and dissemination of economic, social and related data. The first objective is to improve the usefulness and accessibility of international economic and social data to policy makers, both international and national. The availability of international statistics and their usefulness for policy purposes will be broadened and their quality enhanced. For example, given the increasing globalization of the world economy, an increasing number of decision makers at all levels will require data on international transactions. Accordingly, an essential task of the subprogramme will be to sustain the function of the United Nations as a global centre for data on international trade. The same will apply to systems dedicated to environment, energy, transport, national accounts and demographic and social statistics;

(b) A milestone was passed with the finalization of the 1993 System of National Accounts. The objective now is to expand the number of countries that are in a position to implement the new System. To achieve this objective, the Secretariat, in close collaboration with other international organizations, will continue to improve economic statistics in general and to promote the System in particular, including through training and other forms of technical cooperation;

(c) Agenda 21 calls for the development and implementation of integrated environmental and economic accounting and indicators of sustainable development in order to provide the information necessary to formulate policies and strategies for sustainable development at the national and international levels. A third objective will be to improve the international community's ability to measure the environmental impact of human activity and expenditures related to the environment. The subprogramme will address relevant concepts and methods in order to obtain international agreement on their use and usefulness, as well as compile environmental statistics, indicators and accounts;

(d) The World Summit for Social Development and the other global conferences held recently have highlighted the need for more and better statistics to describe and monitor progress in the human dimensions of development. A fourth objective will be to develop and promote the use of consistent and integrated sets of social statistics (including, in particular, demographic, housing, gender and disability statistics), to develop social indicators and to enhance analytical capabilities in this area.

7.5 The subprogramme will also continue to emphasize the coordination and development of international statistical standards across a broad spectrum of statistics.

Subprogramme 7.2 Population

7.6 Population, with its various dimensions, is one of the major challenges confronting the international community. To address that challenge, the subprogramme, for which the Population Division is responsible, will aim at increasing the understanding of the nature of population phenomena, in particular, the interrelationships between population and development, and at providing technical cooperation in population. This increased understanding and knowledge will facilitate the work of the Economic and Social Council, through the Commission on Population and Development, in the substantive coordination of activities of the United Nations system in the field of population and the formulation of policy recommendations.

7.7 The objectives of this subprogramme are as follows:

(a) To expand the leading role of the Department (i) in providing accurate and timely information and analyses of population trends and policies, and (ii) in monitoring and reporting on substantive elements of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development;

(b) In order to formulate policy, Governments need information on population trends and their interrelationships with social and economic development. To that end, the subprogramme will facilitate the access by Governments to information on population trends and their interrelationships with social and economic development as an input to policy formulation through the preparation of the official United Nations demographic estimates and projections for all countries and areas of the world, as well as urban and rural areas and major cities. Those estimates and projections provide the standard and consistent sets of population figures that are used throughout the United Nations system as the basis for activities requiring population information;

(c) The far-reaching consequences of population phenomena and their interrelationships with social and economic development are giving rise to increasing demands by countries and regions for relevant population information and analyses. A third objective will be to increase the understanding of the social, economic and other factors that will affect mortality, fertility, migration and population growth, and how population change, in turn, affects the social, economic and environmental conditions of people;

(d) Rapidly changing international demographic conditions, such as the AIDS pandemic, and new developments on such issues as international migration, call for innovative strategies and policies at both the national and international levels. To that end, the subprogramme will increase awareness about emerging population issues requiring the attention of the international community;

(e) Another objective of the subprogramme is to increase Member States' capacity to formulate national population and related policies for the effective implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and to improve their institutional capabilities for the collection and analysis of national population information.

Subprogramme 7.3 Global development trends, issues and policies

7.8 The overall purpose of the subprogramme, for which the Macroeconomic Division is responsible, will be to assist the international community in identifying emerging challenges and addressing persistent problems in global development. The subprogramme will enhance understanding of international economic and social issues and problems, contribute to improving national and international policies in this area and facilitate the exploration of new forms of international cooperation for development. More specifically, the subprogramme will focus on three main objectives, as follows:

(a) To promote development and foster international economic cooperation through the exploration of national and international policy options. This will be achieved by monitoring and assessing, from a global perspective, economic and social developments and policies, especially those with an international dimension. Work will focus on issues of adjustment and structural change in the developing countries, including their implications for economic growth and development, and on the economic and social transformation of the countries with economies in transition, including their integration into the world economy. It will also address the macroeconomic performance and policies of the industrialized countries and their effects on the world economy;

(b) External debt and finance for development will remain important issues on the global agenda. A second objective will be to increase awareness of the changing nature, volume and direction of international financial flows, propose ways and means to enhance and stabilize both official and private finance, monitor changes in the external debt situation and identify innovative approaches and strategies to resolve the difficulties of countries with debt-servicing problems;

(c) Economic policy-making at the national and international levels is predicated on the availability of up-to-date assessments of major development prospects and the presentation of alternative scenarios. A third objective will be to assist Member States and intergovernmental bodies in the early identification of new and emerging issues in the world economy by providing short-term economic forecasts and perspective studies of long-term global trends in economic and social development.

Subprogramme 7.4 Global approaches to social and micro-economic issues and policies

7.9 The international policy dialogues of the early 1990s on development issues and actions, in particular, the global conferences, gave rise to progress and change in development thinking. They focused attention to the non-economic dimensions of development, highlighted the different contributions of individual agents (people, private enterprises and non-governmental organizations, as well as central and local government) to the development process and underlined the role of market forces in development. In addition, the end of the cold war gave a new focus to the interactions between the political and economic dimensions of the Secretariat's work, for example on such issues as the effects of sanctions.

7.10 The subprogramme, for which the Micro-economic and Social Analysis Division is responsible, will focus on three main objectives, as follows:

(a) To improve the capability of Governments to decide on the role of markets in national efforts to increase efficiency, sustainable economic growth and distributional equity. The subprogramme will undertake policy-oriented analyses of both the potential and shortcomings of market solutions to problems of allocation, distribution and regulation, in particular, with regard to the provision of public goods and services, at the national and international levels;

(b) To enable the world community to respond to persistent problems and emerging issues in socio-economic development. The subprogramme will undertake integrated analyses of global patterns, trends and prospects in socio-economic development and of their implications for strategies at the national and international levels. This will include examination of the role of economic and social institutions and policy instruments, in particular, those designed to avoid the marginalization of segments of society and to promote social integration;

(c) To assist the international community in analysing the linkages between political and economic issues and policies. One group of such issues is the impact of multilateral sanctions, notably those imposed by the Security Council, and of coercive economic measures on both target countries and third States. Another area, which forms part of the Organization's broader effort to arrest and mitigate the consequences of fragmentation within countries, will be to provide economic and social analysis and policy proposals regarding post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation of crisis-stricken areas.